

# FORUM

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## CYBERNETICS AND SOCIETY

At all times in history people have tended to term the most recent machines, or devices, automatic. We hear much in the Press of the future of atomic (or nuclear) power, and little of the probably more important application of atomic physics to the field of control units. Just as the methods of production based on the classical knowledge of electricity—termed scientific management, belt systems, etc.—utilised also the mechanics that was the basic scientific knowledge of the previous method of production, so automatic control units utilise classical electricity and mechanics, and electronics in addition.

Here we describe the physical principles of cybernetics, and a variety of applications of these principles.

### WHAT IS CYBERNETICS?

This term, introduced by Norbert Wiener, signifies the art of pilot, or steersman, and it is the study of "messages of control."

We usually think only of messages being sent from one person to another. This need not be the case at all. If, being lazy, I wish to avoid getting out of bed in the morning, I press a button which turns on the heat, closes the window, and starts an electric heating unit under the coffee pot. I am sending messages to all these pieces of apparatus. If on the other hand, the electric egg boiler starts a whistle going after a number of minutes, it is sending me a message. If the thermostat records that the room is too warm, and turns off the oil burner, the message may be said to be a method of control of the oil burner. Control, in other words, is nothing but the sending of messages which effectively change the behaviour of the recipient.

### WHAT IS FEEDBACK?

The control of a machine on the basis of the difference between its actual performance and its expected performance, is known as feedback.

For example, if we are running an elevator, it is not enough to open the outside door merely when we calculate that the elevator *should* be alongside that door. The

release for the door must be dependent on the fact that the elevator *is* at the doorway; otherwise if anything has hindered it the passenger might step into an empty shaft.

There are other cases where feedback is even more essential. For example, a gun-pointer takes information from his instruments of observation, and conveys it to the gun, so that the latter will point in such a direction that the missile will pass through the moving target at a given time. Now, the gun itself must be used under all conditions of weather. In some of these the grease is warm, and the gun swings easily and rapidly, while in others it is frozen or mixed with sand, and so responds more slowly. The error of the gun-pointer will be decreased if, when it tends to lag, it is given an extra push. Therefore to obtain as uniform a performance as possible a control feedback element is used. This "reads" the lag of the gun behind the desired position, and gives it an appropriate "push" if it lags.

Something very similar to this occurs in human action. If I pick up a pencil, I do not will to move any specific muscles. I turn into action a certain feedback mechanism; namely a reflex in which the amount by which I have yet failed to pick up the pencil is turned into a new and increased order to the lagging muscles, whichever they may be. In this way, a fairly uniform voluntary command will enable the same task to be performed from widely varying initial positions, and irrespective of the decrease of contraction due to fatigue of the muscles. Similarly, when I drive a car, I do not follow out a series of commands dependent simply on a mental image of the road and the task I am doing. If I find the car swerving too much to the left, that causes me to turn it to the right, and vice versa. This depends on the actual performance of the car, and not simply on the road; and allows me to drive with nearly equal efficiency a light Austin or a heavy truck, without having formed separate habits for the driving of each.

The governor, which regulated the speed

on Watt's steam engine (1788) was an early application of feedback. This governor was needed to stop the engine from running wild when its load was removed. If it starts to run wild, or "overrev," the weights of this governor move upward and outward from centrifugal action and operate a lever which cuts off some of the steam, and so the engine slows down again.

### WHAT IS ELECTRONICS?

It is broadly speaking the branch of electrical science dealing with the characteristics of electrons.

Electronic devices depend for their design on a knowledge of these characteristics. Some important electronic devices are; the thermionic valves found in radio sets; the cathode ray tube, which is the viewing screen of present-day home television sets; the photo-electric cell or photo-cell, which is used in some types of photographic exposure meters; the germanium transistor; the klystron tube, etc.

The photo-cell is often called a magic eye because when light falls on it it produces an electric current, which may be used to operate an indicating device. The sense of sight is used very frequently for testing products and processes in industry, and the photo-cell, in conjunction with amplifiers, relays and recorders, is suitable to replace human beings for such work.

Photo-cells have already proved suitable for grading and sorting commodities like rice, beans and cigars, detecting and rejecting tins with labels missing, "reading" a drawing, and controlling a tool in engraving processes. The biggest potentialities, however, lie in their application to the basic production processes of metallurgy and engineering, such as reversing the rollers in steam rolling mills or removing metal bars from the furnace at a given temperature. An inspecting machine for camshafts has been reported in the U.S.A. to use this device, and enables four men to do the work previously requiring eighteen. An even more spectacular machine reported in

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recent years is the photo-electric lathe, in which a photo-cell "reads" the blue print and "controls" the actions of tools on one, or more, lathes accordingly.

Feedback mechanisms may be of a purely mechanical type, but research in World War II has led to the formulation of general principles whereby automatic mechanisms of very varied types, employing electronic feedback circuits, can be readily designed. "George," the automatic pilot, which keeps an aircraft, or guided missile, flying on a constant heading, depends on such a circuit.

During World War II a weapon was developed that showed vividly the potentialities of electronic feedback. The machine embodied radar to follow the movements of an aeroplane, fed this information into an electronic brain which then computed, or predicted, the position of that aeroplane a short time hence, and then the anti-aircraft gun pointed to this predicted position and fired at the appropriate time automatically.

#### ELECTRONIC BRAINS

These are calculating machines that embody feedback circuits. The digital type calculating machines in use today are supplied with the data for calculations from two sets of punched tapes. On one tape the actual quantities (numbers) to be used in the calculation are given symbolically, as a pattern of holes, while the other tape is marked with the processing instructions, such as "add the numbers," "multiply them together," or "divide them," for example. When supplied with the two tapes and switched on, these complicated machines perform these sums very quickly. ENIAC, which is an Electronic Numerical Integrator and Calculator, will make 5,000 additions in a single second!

So the use of such machines allows calculations to be made which would never be completed soon enough to be of any use, if performed by human calculators. The electronic predictor mentioned in the previous section is a good example. Also, the calculation of the result of the last presidential election in the U.S.A. was made correctly by an electronic brain called UNIVAC, taking only 40 minutes on a task which would have taken a team of Einsteins about six months.\*

In recent years the development of electronic

\* The factual basis of this calculation was an orgy of statistics of past elections, described as follows by Alistair Cooke.

"They gave him the returns of the 3,000 counties in this country for every election since 1920; into other cells they poured statistics of the way previous elections had gone at different stages of election night. They fed him horrible casseroles, mixtures of old comparisons between party representation in the Senate, say with the popular vote of the old presidential winners, and tricky contrasts between the habits of the Electoral College and the voting habits of 100 regions of the United States."

—p. 799, "The Listener," 13.11.52. The difference between the result predicted by this machine, and the actual result was less than 1% (4 votes in a total of 500).

tronic brains has led to heated discussions of the question "Can Machines Think?" It is clear that a machine can only solve a problem, or control a process, if it has first been adjusted (or taught) to do so. To that extent it can think. It cannot enjoy a good joke, fall in love, or even dream of that date tonight; though it can simulate the reactions of a human being. In that sense it is not original. But the capitalist does not employ his workers to do that either; he employs them to carry out a number of instructions, just as a machine does. In fact the machine is the perfect worker—the answer to a capitalist's prayer!

#### USE IN WAR

The uses of feedback in gun laying and in the radar controlled gun have already been mentioned. However, it is in the field of aircraft, or missiles, that these devices will make their main impact on warfare.

During the first world war experiments on remote radio control of aircraft were made successfully. In the years that followed a few radio-controlled aircraft were used as targets for gunnery practice. The D.H. Queen Bee aircraft was a British example. In the second world war guided aircraft, controlled from a nearby piloted aircraft, were used by the Germans as a sort of aerial torpedo. Today, to combat jet aircraft that fly at great heights, at speeds approaching the speed of sound (and so are largely immune to the simple anti-aircraft guns) missiles are being developed which in the first stages of flight may be guided, and then steer themselves onto the bombing plane. Duncan Sandys, the Minister of Supply, has already stated that rockets capable of flying at speeds over 2,000 m.p.h. have been built. (*Picture Post*, 22nd November, '52). An offensive weapon to counter such defences is a guided, bomb-carrying rocket of the V.2 type. Research on such weapons is being carried on in the U.S.A. we know. It is unlikely that it is the only country where such work is being done.

#### Social Effects

It is hoped to discuss these in a further article.

#### Some Books on this Subject

*The Human Use of Human Beings* by Norbert Wiener (The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass, U.S.A., 1950).

*Automation* by John Diebold (Van Nostrand 1951).

#### Sections in

*Profile of Science* by Ritchie Calder (Allen and Unwin, 1951).

*It's Bound to Happen* by A. M. Low (Burke Pub. Co., 1950).

*Men, Machines and History* by S. Lilley (Cobbett Press, 1948).

Correspondence and articles should be sent to FORUM, S.P.G.B., 52, Clapham High St., London, S.W.4. Subscriptions 12 months, 7/6d, 6 months 3/9d. Cheques and P.O.'s should be made payable to: E. Lake, S.P.G.B.

#### CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors.

Re A. Turner's letter published in the March issue of "Forum", I wish to state:

1. Regarding abuse—That in my opinion those who oppose the D. of P. and remain members of the Party are the people who are abusing the Party.
2. When members use the Party's premises and Party publications to oppose the Party's case, I do not consider this to be useful to the Party. I repeat, opposition should come from outside the Party. We are not a debating society or a discussion group but a political party with a purpose.
3. Acceptance of the D. of P. must remain the basis for membership of the Party.
4. Does A. Turner admit that he is opposed to the D. of P.?

D. W. LOCK

Dear Comrades,

I want to protest most strongly about the Editorial column which appeared in the February "Forum".

I have no specific axe to grind in this matter, as I disagree with Lock's article, although not necessarily for the same reasons as those of the writer of the Editorial. I am, for the moment, concerned with the principle involved.

What is the purpose of the Editorial Committee of "Forum"? Actually, they are not an "Editorial Committee" in any accepted sense. "Forum" itself has no views and consequently one of the most important tasks of most Editorial Committees—to put across the paper's opinion one way or another—does not exist for the I.P.J. Committee.

The "Forum" Editorial Committee edit a controversial journal, i.e. they correct spelling, type out articles, add up the numbers of words, reject obscene or libellous matter and arrange the order and appearance of the contributions.

That is more or less all.

As a Committee they are, or should be, impartial about the controversial views expressed in the paper. As a Committee they should under no circumstances express a view. Obviously, there is nothing to stop the individual members of the Committee writing to



the journal expressing their own views, so long as the members sign their own names (or write under a pseudonym).

In the February "Forum" the Committee acted outside their authority, in my opinion.

If the member who wrote the article felt so strongly, why didn't he write to "Forum" under his own name? Does the Committee think that in the case of Lock's article the readers are incapable of reaching a verdict unaided?

Many articles in "Forum" are "emotional and without argument". Is the Editorial Committee in future going to point this out to us on every occasion?

I am not attributing malice or any unworthy motives to the writer of the Editorial in question. He made a mistake and one which he should under no circumstances make again. Some members may think my point a small one to warrant this rather long letter but I am concerned for the future of "Forum", as I think it a journal that serves a useful purpose, and the quickest way to kill the paper is for the Editorial to adopt views.

Fraternally,  
Lisa Bryan.

## GETTING THE PARTY A BAD NAME

A writer sent an article to the *Socialist Standard*. The manuscript began:

"This writer enjoyed his visit to the evangelist crusade at Harringay. He listened to Billy Graham, the newest American revival preacher, he saw three hundred people 'saved,' he sang the hymns louder than anyone else, and he went home feeling that sin had a lot to be said for it."

The article was received, was edited, was published. It began:

"This writer enjoyed his visit to the evangelist crusade at Harringay. He listened to Billy Graham, the newest American revival preacher, and he went home feeling that sin had a lot to be said for it."

The story probably has a moral, only the writer can't think what it is. But he's sure it is too good to keep to himself.

\* \* \*

Why, of course—I've got it! "Group interests" at work! Help! Tony, quick! The tuneless H and the cacophonous McC, seething with envy because C can sing, applying the insidious gag . . . Help!

C.

# CAPITALISM AND HEALTH

Comrade Bott, in criticising my lecture on "Capitalism and Health", displays intellectual dishonesty unworthy of a member of the Party. At first I intended to ignore his long harangue in the January "Forum"—for who could not write a criticism of another's lecture, selecting points to suit his purpose and avoiding those which have been raised at the lecture?

I was careful to quote authentic figures when I claimed that immunisation was not responsible for the decline in diphtheria, and Bott could have taken me up on this point, instead of putting up his Aunt Sally at this stage.

He wrote in the January Forum "*the fact that the mortality rate of those actually contracting the disease (diphtheria) has been reduced from 80 per cent. to 5 per cent. is certainly the result of the use of diphtheria anti-serum in the early stages of infection.*" This is rubbish, and I would like to ask Com. Bott what evidence he has to give apart from stating this. He does not quote the source of information, nor the period under review, nor the place or country where his figures apply.

I will repeat what I quoted at the lecture. In 1916 there were 5,366 deaths from diphtheria in England and Wales. In 1939 there were 2,130 deaths from diphtheria in England and Wales. Both figures are from the Registrar General's Report for these respective years. The diphtheria immunisation campaign started in 1941, so why this great decline before immunisation? If Com. Bott wants to criticise or give explanations of the theory behind immunisation, let him answer the above facts.

I further quoted in the lecture that cholera and typhus which were once both rabad in England, have now completely disappeared, and before any vaccine or serum could be found for them. Why was this?

Furthermore, as I also quoted in the lecture, in 1871 when everybody in England

was vaccinated (and had to be vaccinated by compulsion as there were no conscientious objectors allowed) 41,000 vaccinated people died in the great small-pox epidemic of that year (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). To-day, with less than half the British population vaccinated, a small-pox death is of such rare occurrence that when it does occur it gets a headline in the papers.

In the 14 years 1933—1946 inclusive (also quoted in my lecture Com. Bott) not one child under 12 months of age died of small-pox in England and Wales; but 51 babies died during this period from post-vaccinal encephalitis (that is, were killed by vaccination). This was given out by the Minister of Health in the House of Commons on November 10th 1947 in reply to a question. As it is doctors who have to sign the death certificates, and who themselves are mostly in favour of vaccination, we can be perfectly sure that they have not made the case too black against themselves. One wonders how many deaths from vaccination and immunisation are attributed to other things.

There is only one thoroughly vaccinated country in the world at the present time, the Philippines, and during the last five years 72,000 people (all vaccinated) have died there from small-pox, according to the official figures issued in the only international report which gives statistics about such epidemics. To save Com. Bott thinking out an explanation to this, I will give him the orthodox reply. Yes, it is true that 72,000 have died there of small-pox during the five years, but if we had not vaccinated, the whole population might have died from small-pox.

It is high time that members of the S.P.G.B., who have learnt that doctors and other scientists are the paid lackeys of capitalism, should open their eyes to what is going on in medicine, health and disease. To point this out was one of the purposes of my lecture.

H. JARVIS

## NOTE

Under the title "The Sentimental Anarchists" in the March "Forum", Coster referred to the Editorial Committee in the following passage:

"The election address was not very good—and the E.C. turned it down

(after turning down a real shocker from the Editorial Committee)."

The Election Address submitted by the Editorial Committee was subsequently printed in the Election Special under the title "What We Stand For". Members are therefore in a position to judge if it was "a real shocker".

GILMAC and HARDY



# THE NATURE OF THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

## 6. *The Ideological Reflection (continued)*

The spectre of Communism still haunts the Socialist movement. We have put our hand through the ghost of "natural superiority" and emancipated ourselves from dependence on "leaders," yet because, so far, we have equated independence with political hostility, we remain only the Quaker, Channel-cushioned, variety of proletarian Communism. The crux of our dilemma is that we still bear the imprint of the past revolutions in which we were cradled. In the act of establishing Socialist *political* independence we have accepted also the Communist strategy of political participation, and in the course of fifty years determination to wage war on all other political parties we have come to accept the revolutionary attitude as meaning anti-reformism, and revolution as the mere negation of all that is. In establishing Socialist *political* independence we preserve our familiar kinship with those whom we oppose, as being reformist, notwithstanding that revolution is the one thing that can't be sold from the hustings, because politics is essentially and necessarily reformist. (But because our movement is dedicated to the concept, however rudimentary, of a new society, it contains the possibility, and the necessity, of achieving independence *from* politics and of raising revolution-activity to a level qualitatively different from that of Communism.) Moreover, in establishing Socialist *political* independence, we have deemed this to be the sign that the "material conditions are ripe," and the Socialist Idea therefore complete. Thus the political independence of the Party has become the social independence of the Socialist Idea, outside social and historical change, a separate power in itself, creating history in opposition to history, and reducing the revolution to the nonsense of a single political act, thus repelling the intuitive sense of men and ensuring our impotence as revolutionary agents by insisting that until that single act history stands still.

As historical materialists we dare not deny continuous social change—fundamentally. So with the reason that finds reasons we find that whatever happens, nothing happens—fundamentally. Since 1904 all that has happened adds up to nothing—fundamentally. Corporate State, Welfare State, New Deal, Nazism, Titoism, Russian, Chinese, Indian

and African revolutions—these have motion, but no direction, for they are capitalism—fundamentally. The new industrial revolution of spaceships and atoms, of plastics, cybernetics and electronic brains, and the new industrial, political and international integrations which accompany them—the mind staggers at the dizzy speed with which, today, nothing happens (fundamentally).

When Torricelli first demonstrated that mercury in a vacuum tube would rise only to a height of 33 inches, leaving the vacuum above it empty, the Paduan professors refused to accept the evidence of their sense, for "nature abhors a vacuum." Whereupon Torricelli drew the sardonic conclusion that "nature evidently abhors a vacuum up to 33 inches." In our turn we must conclude that social evolution is continuous up to 1904.

### POT AND KETTLE

Like good Communists, we use our thin materialism for exposing class interests, and have come to regard class struggle as the engine of social change. Dominating our minds is not the material, artifactual, social-productive determination of class relationships, but the class (and therefore *ideological*) determination of social change. It is the (class) Idea which for us is the dynamic of history. For us, historical-materialist, the social productive forces no longer evolve and change society in the process: only the Idea moves. For us, historical-materialist, it moves *in spite of and in opposite direction to* the material forces of capitalism. Like good Communists, the Labour Theory of Value is understood by us only as a theory of exploitation, and we do not wish to know that it explains capital's inhering necessity to socialise itself. Like good Communists, we are concerned with capital only as political *matter*, and dare not see it as social *motion*. Indeed, we are opposed to it, as resolutely as the Pope was once opposed to the motion of the earth, and the suggestion that we might usefully discern Socialist direction in the growth of Capitalism is conceived as reformism. How else can it be conceived when revolution is conceived as anti-reformism?

The more outrageous idealism (as I see it) which has emerged in recent discussions; the claim that there are no laws of social

development, and that the Socialist idea can be communicated to anyone anywhere (irrespective of social conditions) and anywhen (independent of history)—this idealism is not so much a departure from our position as an extension of it. Our Communist political idealism leaves us wide open to attack by our Anarchist idealists. So long as the revolutionary pot insists, as an instrument of class struggle, that the Socialist idea is the dynamic of social change, the revolutionary kettle can reply, as an instrument of utopian Socialism, with the Idea-at-Large, undetermined by material social process. And because this anarchism is just one half of our idealist backside, it makes the same objection, from the other side, to the suggestion that Capitalism (and therefore Socialism) evolves: we must not concede that Capitalism itself moves, for then we should be compelled to *support* its movement, and cease to be revolutionary.

Since Copernicus, science has not felt it necessary to support or oppose terrestrial motion: it interprets, and by interpreting, creates. But social science is the last to be conscripted for capitalist production, and our college is still the Labour Chapel. Our Socialism is still little more than Communist opposition to exploitation leavened by a still Anarchist vision of classless society. Because our political independence was historically condemned to emerge first, not as independence from politics, but as competition with all other political parties, "revolutionary" has continued to mean "anti-reformist," our Socialist propaganda has remained only universal opposition, and our Socialism-creative influence negated by our own nihilism. "We welcome opposition"—for fifty years our stock-in-trade: in another fifty our epitaph?

### THE D. OF P

No. It is not a long time, as time goes. Our obsession with opposition is only a cradle mark. Militant opposition to the universe is the first squawking of the newly born. The Mayflower set sail in 1904, its Declaration of Independence nailed aloft, but we remain offshore, facing shore. Pioneers all, the pioneers once stood, and having accepted we have refused to budge an inch from where



Capitalism as completed and the Socialist idea as complete, we have not conceived it necessary to enrich or enlarge our understanding of our Principles. With the Communist Manifesto, the D. of P. stands as a landmark in the history of the Socialist movement, a brilliantly economical summary of its time, and sung with a resonance that rings like bells through half a hundred years. It is not the stature of the Principles which falls short, but ours who wear them as a talisman, an octave of gods known by name or number, or hold them as a shield against all comers, or fling them as a gauntlet in opposition to the world, or see them as a monument instead of a signpost, or use them as an anchor to a dollhouse political platform instead of as a compass to discover and proclaim the movement of society towards Socialism, thus shortening the birthpangs.

To ease the revolutionary socialist idea from its Communist political cocoon, in which it remains mere sterile anti-reformism, is at the same time to rescue its humanism from utopia. For a purely logical description of future society is no improvement on a patho-

logical description of the present one, and only by construing Socialist society from the movement of history (and therefore of Capitalism) can it rise from the level of being anyone's present wish and therefore nobody's present concern. To be revolutionary is to be materialist-historically aware of the general character of men within the multifariousness of human conduct, and materialist-historically aware of the general drive of history within the welter of events, and therefore the inhering necessity of capital to socialise itself. These things provide the rationale for Socialism, and give the "historical necessity for Socialism" its necessity. Outside of this materialist discipline, the discussion of Socialist society is utopian, and allows the pioneers among us who have stopped dead in their tracks to say "your guess is as good as mine, and I'm not guessing." Without discussion of Socialist society we cannot kindle the belly-fires of human indignation which is the drive of social revolt, nor light a torch to see by. Only within this socially disciplined discussion of socialist society can we give articulation and focus to the needs of men as animals and as conditioned by existing productive forces.

Only thus can we enter on the blank cheque the figures which men will endorse, and provide ourselves with a field of activity more unifying, more enduring, and more socially influential than the political confidence trick which has nothing to offer but a dream wrapped up in a wet blanket.

The practical possibility of doing so will be discussed in the next and last section.

F. EVANS.

### DE PROFUNDIS

"If we can show it, (Socialism) as having a necessity outside men's wishes, and therefore binding on all, we make an ally of the social instinct."

Chap. 6—The Nature of the Socialist Revolution—Evans.

Oh Evans, Pantheistic scribe,  
So intellectual, erudite,  
Descendant of the Stoic tribe,  
Does Nature fight the workers' fight?

There was a purpose after all,  
Before the birds and fishes:  
And this the Answer to IT all—  
Necessity outside men's wishes.

P. McHale.

## SOCIALISM AND RELIGION

Following close upon his physical needs, the metaphysical needs of man are deeply rooted in the human race; the temples, churches, pagodas and mosques in every land testify to the metaphysical needs of man.

Man is the only animal that wonders at its own existence, and also the only animal that carries about with him in his abstract conceptions the certainty of his death, although this troubles him only when he brings it to his imagination. The very fact that all men must die has been, and will always be of deep concern to all men under all isms, creeds, and doctrines. All religious teachings are principally directed to this end, and are thus primarily the antidote to the certainty of death, which reflective reason produces out of its own means.

If life were endless and painless there would be no religious or philosophical systems of thought, for it is most certainly due to the fact that there is death and suffering in the world that men take the trouble to try and understand the riddle of the world.

We must bear in mind that suffering never began with the introduction of Capitalism, nor will it end under Socialism. The problem of suffering goes much deeper than economics, for one has also a biological factor to consider, and also a sexual one.

The Buddhist religion is very much concerned with the problem of suffering, and the beliefs of the Buddhists are based on the following principles:—

1. That there is suffering. 2. That there is a cause for that suffering. 3. That such a cause can be removed. 4. That there is a way of deliverance, viz., the doctrine of Buddha. There can be no doubt that we can as socialists agree with the Buddhists on three of these profound truths, that is, the first three. The fourth one is a truth in itself, and may even be practised on a large scale under Socialism. However, it seems to me a very heartening aspect that socialists can agree on three out of four principles of one of the largest religious bodies in the world.

It seems to me rather foolish that we should pooh-pooh all this. Our purpose is to abolish Capitalism, not Religion, and no political party or any other sort of organisation, will ever succeed in that endeavour. To try this is to be likened to Sisyphus in Homer's *Odyssey* who was tormented in Hades, having eternally to roll a rock up a hill, from the top of which it always rolls down again. This in my opinion is really what all criticisms of religion will ever amount to, an endless and hopeless task which is like

trying to fill the sieves of the Danaides.

It would be much wiser when writing articles as regards Religion, to assert where we are in full agreement, and also where we differ, but to write articles in such a manner as Jarvis is doing in the *Socialist Standard* is really extremely foolish, and will not do the Party good, but harm.

The Buddhist has no God or Creator, and we are in full agreement with three of the fundamental principles of his Religion—that is something not to be scoffed at.

I have never read nor had in my possession the pamphlet on Religion published by the Party stating its attitude to all religions. However, in my opinion an organisation that is to establish a new social order where suffering will possibly be greatly diminished, should consider the religious bodies that are primarily concerned with the sufferings of the Human Race, and not attack their inmost beliefs as nonsense and trash. Dialectical Materialism was not the first word, nor will it be the last word on everything.

As I have said, religion will carry on under socialism just as it did more or less under every other 'ism, and in my opinion, all this should be carefully considered for the benefit of the Party and Socialism.

R. SMITH.



## EDITORIAL COMMENT

We publish this month an article and a letter which object to the criticism of Lock's article in the Feb. editorial. Both writers read into the criticism opinions which were not intended.

The editorial (which was the work of our Committee, not of a member) did not approve or disapprove of the views held and expressed in the various articles by Lock. We agree that partiality in commenting on the opinions expressed in FORUM should be avoided in editorials. This has been and is our policy. Apart from this being good policy, it would not be possible to have an editorial opinion on most of the issues that have been presented in FORUM, because the individual members of the I.P.J. Committee do not hold identical opinions on them.

The point of our criticism was to stress the desirability of reasoned argument as opposed to abuse. It appears that we might have overstressed this, to the point that it might have seemed that we were necessarily opposed to Lock's views. If this is so, it cautions care in the future, but not that we should refrain from doing one of our jobs, that is, making what editorial comment is relative to the publication of FORUM.

We disagree that there is no scope for editorial comment of any kind. Contributions from other committees have been published under their titles without complaint. We see no reason why this should not be so in the case of the committee that edits FORUM.

\* \* \*

H. B. is critical because we said that there is no evidence of views being put forward which are incompatible with Party membership.

We still say it. For a long time in the Party it has been the practice to permit disagreement with the Party's policy and interpretation of Socialism, except in written and spoken propaganda. It could be that H. B. disagrees with this practice (as might the individual editors of FORUM), but it is a little off the mark for him to claim that what the Party rules, permits or approves is "incompatible with Party membership". What other evidence is needed of this practice in the Party than the existence of FORUM?

# WELL, WELL, WELL!

Well now, who ever would have thought this would happen? The boys on the Editorial Committee of "Forum" have found a cap that fits and they have worn it. They have used their claws and shown their teeth with a snarl. And who is responsible for this sad state of affairs? Why, it is that terrible menace Comrade D. W. Lock (with his bad sense of smell).

If the editors are supposed to be impartially running a controversial journal, is it not just a little strange that they should pause to make comment on this particular article ("Revisionism and Renegades in the S.P.G.B."), when they have had such a fine crop of weird and wonderful masterpieces to choose from?

As for what they have to say about Comrade Lock's article, it proves one of two things. Either they don't read their own journal and go around the party blind and deaf to what goes on—or they are just plain crazy.

They say "nothing which has appeared so far could lead us to assert that within the party there are those 'who hold opinions which are incompatible with membership of the party'", while on the very next page Turner calmly tears up everything the party stands for and A. A. N. does the same thing on the preceding page.

They then, with conjured innocence, ask Comrade Lock to state the facts "which lead him to make the accusation that there are 'individuals in the party who are opposed to the D. of P.' and who have differences with the party on 'fundamental aspects of the party's case'". Their final blow, adding insult to injury, is to recommend Lock's attendance at the Saturday evening Knitting Club and Word Spinners' Retreat at Head Office.

I have hitherto left "Forum" to the controversialists, but things seem to have reached a stage where it is necessary to spend my two cents. If our editors want some evidence about views "incompatible with membership of the party" here it is:

"A socialist party is not a class or group party; it is not a capitalist class party nor is it a working class party."

(Turner, Feb. "Forum")

So, quite out of the blue, we have an existence apart from being thrown up by the *material conditions of class struggle*.

I hope I do not bore the more intelligent members when I say that, since the working class is the last subject class in history, it alone can dispossess the capitalist parasites (or are they going to abdicate?) This dispossession will be the final act of *class struggle* (the act to end classes); a struggle carried on unceasingly throughout the life of Capitalism. The capitalist class is a reactionary class of plunderers: the working class is alone the revolutionary class.

We have not the slightest point of contact with workers apart from how they gain and carry on their living. It is from an understanding of their material conditions that we are born as a party, and our object arises not from any Godly concepts of mankind. We cannot reconcile the classes.

To have nothing but contempt for the life and struggle of the workers we speak to is a first-class way of not making members. Next comes a pearl of wisdom which contrives to mix up races, families and income groups with class divisions—this is no doubt done to make the pill more easily swallowed.

"A socialist party does not appeal to any class or group as such. It appeals to MANKIND, not to capitalists, nor to



wage-workers, nor to nations, nor races, nor families, nor income groups . . .

We cannot salute people with "Fellow Workers" . . .

It is obvious that, using Turner's yardstick, the S.P.G.B., *cannot* be a socialist party, because it does do precisely those things which he claims a socialist party cannot do.

How does he and those who agree with him square their statements with their continued membership of this non-socialist party—or is it all right with the rest of the members if this sort of thing is said on their behalf?

If they are trying to convert us into "socialists" why not work in the Labour or Conservative party—they are bigger, and one non-socialist outfit is as much part of MANKIND as another. "Fellow Workers" is not a salutation but a form of address.

Comrade Turner used to spend a lot of time quite rightly explaining "there are no royal roads to Socialism—no short cuts". But now the royal carpet is spread, and the road is via mankind.

\* \* \*

May I say at this point that I disagree with Comrade Lock if he attacks the party as a whole. I only share what he says of the "renegades" or controversial introverts. I also think that some contributions to "Forum" have been useful, notably D'Arcy's (Feb.), Judd's (Jan.), and one or two others on similar lines, which should, however, not be necessary in the S.P.G.B.

I hope I will be forgiven for a slight digression, but A. A. N. is either unique in having completely identical errors to Comrade Turner or he has been looking over his shoulder, and S. R. P. wants to carry the confusion into the S.S. It is amazing how they cut the cloth to fit their case.

The official organ of the party must speak for the party, not the controversial wizards who see themselves as the pioneers of (new-look) Socialism, superseding Marx and the founders of the party. If the S.S. is not what it used to be, this can be understood when those who write for it do so in the present atmosphere of halfheartedness.

Let us stop frittering our time away. Socialism is worth every effort we can make and a lot more than most of us do. Let us stop playing games and get down to the serious work of winning the WORKING-CLASS over to Socialism.

H. B.

## ARE THE WORKERS BETTER OFF?

### (Round Two)

First the facts. In the December 1952 issue of FORUM was published a letter which had originally been written to the E. C., and had then been circulated to the Branches.

This letter urged Party speakers to change from "just attacking Capitalism to describing Socialism." In reviewing the efforts of Party speakers the statement was made that

"Older speakers unconsciously preclude questions of the future by creating the impression that conditions have grown worse and will continue to do so. This does not fit the facts of experience."

I understood this to mean that Capitalism improves the conditions of the working-class, and that their experience had proved it. I therefore wrote a comment on this letter in the April FORUM in which I stated that "I hold, as a Socialist, that the conditions have grown worse, and will continue to do so."

It would seem, therefore, that there is a real disagreement here. In the one view, Capitalism improves the workers' conditions; in the other, it does not.

After further consideration I wrote an article (October issue) entitled "Are the Workers Better Off?" In this article I categorically stated that "As Capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer must get worse." I also stated explicitly that the contrary opinion was fatal to the Socialist case.

It should be made quite clear that I have in mind the permanent economic laws of the capitalist system; not its temporary fluctuations. This question can only be seriously discussed from the angle of social development.

It would be readily agreed, for example, that the years 1939-45 and after were years in which the workers were "better off" than they were in 1929 and 30, for the reason that they had employment. The most favourable condition for wage-labour is the accumulation of Capital. Such "ups" prove nothing, because they are followed by "downs" which cancel them out. In this case, the workers exchanged the leisure of the dole-queue for the comfort of the Air-Raid Shelter, or the warmth of the Battle-field.

### THE ARGUMENT

Capitalism is based upon wage-labour. It is a competitive system, in which capitalists

undersell each other. To maintain profit, the employers must get workers to produce more Surplus Value. To get more Surplus Value they must increase surplus labour—that part of the working day during which workers produce solely for the capitalist. There are three ways of doing this:—

1. By stretching the number of hours worked;
2. By speeding up in the same hours as before; or
3. By cheapening the stuff the workers live on.

No matter which way it is done, the worker is worse off.

As Capitalism grows, more Capital is needed to set a labourer to work. Therefore the composition of Capital changes. Variable Capital (labour) decreases, and Constant Capital (machinery) increases. As Variable Capital decreases the rate of Surplus Value tends to fall, since Surplus Value comes solely from the *Variable* Capital, though calculated on the entire Capital.

Therefore, it is a law of Capitalism that the Rate of Profit tends to fall.

The capitalist tries to counteract this. He increases Constant Capital to increase productivity, and the workers therefore receive a steadily diminishing proportion of their produce. The Capitalist gets a greater mass of Surplus Value, but its *Rate* declines. In this sense, the workers are subject to a law of increasing misery, in that the proportion which they receive, of the total value they create, continually declines. It is exclusively a proportional relationship.

The capitalist system develops convulsions called crises of overproduction. The reason for this is the inability of workers to buy back what they make. It is therefore a law of Capitalism that, as it grows, the workers can buy less and less of their produce, making bigger crises.

If the workers' conditions are permanently improving, then Capitalism is not an antagonistic socially-harmful system. It does not deprive workers. It must be exploiting them less, as it improves them more. How can it be said that Capitalism robs the working class, when it is continually giving them more? Capitalism, then, is not an anarchic system producing crises; the troubles will all be ironed out, as the workers solve overproduction by buying back more and more as they improve.



This erroneous idea of the improvement of workers' conditions under Capitalism breeds absurdities in some members' propaganda. Thus it has been said in answer to questions:—"I don't care if the workers get double their present wages, £20 a week with no alterations in prices, I'm not interested, I want Socialism." It would be hard to devise a more nonsensical statement. The workers cannot get double wages without alterations in prices, because wages ARE prices. If this speaker had said—"We are opposed to the whole wages system—because wages can never be anything but the cost-of-not-living. We want Socialism"—it might have had a bit of sense.

If the workers' conditions are steadily improving, then it follows that the poor must be getting richer, as the rich get poorer. This means that Capitalism equalizes society, and classes are on the way out. Why anybody should then want Socialism is inexplicable.

According to "A. T." & Co., therefore, Capitalism is Capitalism, for the benefit of the working-class.

I hold, as a Socialist, that the Capitalist system is a system of slavery which grows not less but more severe, as the social productive forces of labour develop. While the worker develops as a worker, he deteriorates as a human being.

#### THE EXPLANATION

Can we measure the workers' position at any given time in Capitalist society?

Answer: Yes. The only thing that can be measured to compare the workers' position, at any time, is the proportion of the wealth they retain of what they produce, at that time.

This measurement is quite feasible, and has been made repeatedly. Thus we know that, despite very great increases in the wealth produced in the first half of the last century, there was an increase in pauperism.

To try to compare the standard of living of workers of, say, 1850 with 1950, is futile. Some contributors to FORUM seem to have attributed this to me, without reason.

It is quite possible to analyse the working day in 1850, and to conclude that the worker then spent 1/3 of his day in necessary labour, 2/3 therefore going to his employer. If the data for 1950 showed that the worker spent 1/4 only of his day on himself, then the 20th Century man is, in fact, worse off. This will express itself in greater social discrepancy than before, and show the worker that the capitalist is relatively wealthier than he was, generating more social discontent.

If the modern worker, conversely, works 2/3 of his day for himself, he would be correspondingly better off; in this case, twice

as well off.

Capitalism, being based on sale on the market, drags everybody into the vortex. Every device of human ingenuity is used to convince potential buyers that they must have all sorts of things, once luxuries, now needs.

Capitalism frequently throws masses of workers into violent motion. In employment—out. To War! Back home! Emigrate. Overtime. New Industries. New Towns. Strikes. Lockouts.

The wage slaves of Capitalism are not a stagnating mass like the slaves of Ancient Rome, but an active and volatile social factor, who can and will act. Knowledge of the economics of Capitalism shows that the increasing misery of the working-class is accompanied by a corresponding growth in its numbers, organization and experience.

The worsening position of the workers under Capitalism—its hopelessness—is what makes Socialism their only hope. The increasing misery of the workers is a linchpin of Socialist economics. It is the inescapable outcome of the law of relative Surplus Value and the falling Rate of Profit.

The Socialist Party, therefore, does not seek to improve the workers' conditions—but to abolish the working-class.

HORATIO

#### \* \* \* CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE JUNE ISSUE SHOULD BE IN BY MAY 11th. \* \* \*

#### \* \* \* CORRESPONDENCE (continued from Page 34)

Comrades,

On March 2nd, the E.C. following up a complaint laid by Comrade Coster questioned Comrade G. Hilbinger.

The complaint was, that Hilbinger during the course of plugging our case in the 'Socialist Leader', had committed the heinous offence of transgressing Principle No. 7. The offending sentence of his letter to the 'Socialist Leader' (13.2.54) was: "How can a Marxist party, or any other party for that matter, 'represent working-class interests'?" Now this may or may not contravene No. 7, depending upon which way you interpret the principle. What I would like to know is where the above sentence disagrees with the party's case? If as our Object says, Socialism is in the interest of the whole

community, where is Hilbinger wrong? To say that we represent working-class interests, is to imply that Socialism is not in the interest of the capitalist class, which belies our Object. The logic of that argument is that the capitalist class have no problems that can be solved by Socialism! In which case to be consistent we should be trying our hardest to become capitalists and advocating such a course to others. In actual fact, we say otherwise. Therefore a Socialist party cannot represent sectional or class interests. The other aspect of Hilbinger's sentence, that no party can represent the working-class's interests, is soon disposed of. All parties (other than Socialist) aspire to run capitalism; some say they will run it in the interests of the working-class, others in the interests of all classes. But we know that capitalism can only be run in one way, in the interests of the capitalist class. Which again bears out Hilbinger's statement.

\* \* \*  
What prompted me to write this letter was not just implications of Hilbinger's sentence and the E.C.'s disagreement with it, but the disgusting exhibition by the E.C. on March 2nd. I hope I never witness such a scene again. A diffident party member being badgered and browbeaten by the E.C. in an atmosphere which surely must have been reminiscent of the Roman Catholic inquisitions. The following comment from a bystander at H.O. is an illuminating one. "He (Hilbinger) would have stood a better chance in a Capitalist Court of Law, at least he would have had a better hearing!"

To me the most nauseating aspect of it all, was the hypocrisy of the whole business. Many E.C. members hold views which clash with some aspects of the party case, some even disagreeing with the Object! Yet they could still pass a pious resolution telling Hilbinger that he had been a bad lad and that he must be a good boy in future.

\* \* \*  
I think that we should amend the rules operating to the E.C. to relieve it of its autocratic functions and make it a purely administrative body with no power over the individual member or branches. Then and then only can we obviate such scenes as occurred on March 2nd. Any cases of discipline, complaints etc., could be referred direct to Annual Conference to decide. This would at least be a little more democratic, as representing a majority of the party, which the E.C. does not; being a handful of members with no responsibility to anyone but themselves.  
Jon Keys.